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ABSTRACT

Students in the middle school are all sizes and shapes physically, at different levels of mental maturity and at different stages of socialization. The diverse needs of these individuals can be satisfied only by providing a comprehensive physical education program containing a required program supplemented with intramurals, club sports and interschool components. The interschool competition could be unnecessary if the other three facets of the program are functioning to their fullest and should have lowest priority for facilities, budget and faculty time. The club sports and intramural programs are barely touched by many schools and have tremendous room for expansion. These programs have declined because of demands on facilities but perhaps administrators should reevaluate their priorities to meet the needs of the majority of the students in their school. Students should have the opportunity to experience a wide variety of activities in a daily program in their transitional years. The lessons should be vigorous, skill development oriented, with instruction on mechancial and physiological concepts incorported into the teaching. The length of time activities are scheduled should reflect the developmental differences between sixth and eighth graders, with short exploratory activities for sixth graders and longer skill developing units for eighth graders. (Author)

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PROGRAMS AND PRACTICES TO MEET THE NEEDS OF THE MIDDLE SCHOOL CHILD

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You have just heard that the students we are talking about have more differences than commonalities. They are --

- all sizes and shapes physically
- at different levels of mental maturity
- at different stages of socialization
- have experienced different backgrounds

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In other words--

- Each student is different
- Each student is unique
- Each student is an individual

I have the task of discussing a physical education program that will meet the needs of these students as they are growing - sometimes very rapidly - and changing from children to adolescents.

As I was gathering materials and attempting to decide what should be included in this endeavor, the thought crossed my mind that the organizer of this program must not like me very much. There simply is not one set program that will be mutually beneficial for the big, strong, and mature, as well as for the weak, spindly, and immature student in the middle grades. That is why the title of this presentation is "Programs and Practices," that will meet the needs of all of the students in the middle school.

To meet the needs of this diverse group of students who comprise the student body of the school located between elementary school and high school, we will need a comprehensive offering of activities. This comprehensive program should include a minimum of

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four parts to comprise a total curriculum. Even as these four components are discussed, you will see that there can and should be diversity within each.

The four components of a total curriculum are:

1. The Required Physical Education Program
2. The Intramural Program
3. The Sports Club Program
4. The Athletic Program

Let's look at these components in ascending order of their potential in serving the largest number of students.

The Athletic Program

Inclusion of this program might surprise some of you who have read some of my previous statements. I still feel that if the other three phases of the curriculum are developed to their fullest potential that the value of an athletic program is minimal. However, I am also realistic enough to know that the majority of middle schools and junior high schools in this country do participate in some form of athletic endeavor. It is better to include this phase of activity under the umbrella of a curriculum to insure that the program is directed toward desirable educational goals.

A well-conceived interschool sports program will serve the needs of about twenty percent of the students in a large school and perhaps up to forty percent in a small school. A program should consist of both individual and team activities to meet the interests of as wide a range of both boys and girls as possible.

Two organizational patterns are possible for interschool competition. The predominant pattern is the one of having one team represent a school or a grade level in each activity. These players

are selected, practice daily, and compete, traditionally, for the "glory and honor of the school." The team(s) represent(s) the school in competitions with teams from other schools.

A second organizational pattern is to conduct an intramural program in an activity. At the conclusion of intramural competition, two schools schedule to play each other. The first place teams from each school play, the second place teams play each other, and so on. This system operates under the assumption that if competition with students from another school is beneficial, then that experience should be made available to as many students as possible.

Since a school should operate under a priority system that gives top priority to programs that have the potential to provide beneficial effects to the largest number of students, the interschool athletic program should not be the top priority for use of facilities, budget or faculty time.

The Club Sports Program

The third most important curricular area for the middle school is club sports. This area is barely touched by many schools so there is tremendous room for expansion. The general pattern is for clubs to be formed for activities that are not included in the regular physical education, intramural or athletic program but are of interest to students in the school. Examples of this could be a scuba-diving club in Brownsville, Texas; or a cross-country skiing club in Sault Sainte Marie, Michigan; or a rock-climbing club in Boulder, Colorado; or a polka dancing club in Sun Prairie, Wisconsin; or a bicycling club in Red Bluff, California.

The general organizational pattern is for an interested group of students or adults who want to share their interest in a

particular activity to form a governing group and select a faculty advisory. Many times the actual activity is led and conducted by a person not associated with the school but who has expertise or interest in the activity area. The club members can meet before school, after school, or on weekends to pursue their interests. There is no limit to the number of clubs or the types of activities that can be included in a club sports program at a school.

This is an important part of the comprehensive physical activity offerings that, if organized and promoted properly, will meet the special activity needs and interests of a large number of students.

The Intramural Program

The second program in importance for students is the intramural program. In many schools, this is a non-entity or it does not exist at all. A popular reason for the decline in intramurals is the shortage of facilities brought about by the introduction of girls' sports activities. This is probably true in many school districts. But, perhaps the administrators in these districts should re-examine their priorities in relationship to the benefits for the majority of students. There are some who say that intramurals is no longer needed because of the proliferation of opportunities available in private and municipally-sponsored youth sports. It is true that there is a very high participation level in youth sports in the elementary school age population. However, the comprehensive study by the Michigan Youth Sports Institute found a dramatic drop in participation around the age of 12 or 13. This is the age group we are discussing today. Many of these students need an opportunity to supplement class activity within the walls of their school - in an intramural program.

There is a need for the students who are not skilled enough at this stage in their growth processes to be selected for an athletic team to be involved in sports at their level of ability. We are presently looking at the selection process for seventh grade basketball players in a Texas school district. Some of the schools have over 100 students aspiring to be on the team. The teams carry twenty players so the vast majority of these students are denied the opportunity to play. In comparing data between the two groups, it was found that maturity played a very large part in the selection. In fact, in the girls at seventh grade, no basketball skills test showed any significant difference - only in maturity measures of size and strength were the girls who were selected for the team better than the ones who were not chosen. The students who did not make the team would benefit from an intramural program. After all, it is very difficult to predict the potential of players until the physical growth process is complete.

An intramural program should be comprehensive. It should include a wide range of team, dual and individual activities - the same activities included in the physical education program. Organization patterns can vary. Some schools organize through physical education classes, others through English classes and still others have an open sign-up. The key is to organize in a manner that permits maximum opportunity for participation of all of the students "within the walls" of the school. Intramural programs have the potential of serving the largest number of students outside the regular physical education program. Therefore, this program should be assigned the highest priority for facility use outside of class time.

Yes, there should be an intramural program in every middle school to contribute to the health and physical well-being of all of the students.

The Physical Education Program

There have been a number of organizational patterns for physical education curriculums discussed in the literature. We read about the Individualized Curriculum in Omaha, Nebraska; the Competency-Based Curriculum in Madison, Wisconsin; the Elective Program in Eugene, Oregon; the Independent Contract Curriculum in Rutland, Vermont; and a number of other variations in organizing for optimum value from physical education. The proponents of each of these curricular patterns feel their program is the best for meeting the needs of the students in their schools.

This presentation will not discuss the merits, or demerits, of these patterns of organization. Each and every one is good if the content included within course offerings produce a physically-educated individual, one who is capable of entering high school with a background of physical skills that provides enough self confidence to enter the adolescent society as an equal.

The students should have the opportunity to participate in physical activity on a daily basis. The growth processes - developing strong, sturdy bones, the body musculature and connective tissue - are enhanced by consistent physical activity. The restlessness apparent in this age group, resulting from the psychological tensions caused by physical and emotional changes, need an avenue for release. Daily activity provides an opportunity for the students to focus their attention on doing things instead of thinking about themselves.

The content should be varied. The students should have the opportunity to experience a wide variety of activities during the three years they spend in this transitional school. They need to find out what their "new" body can accomplish - what skills they can perform at a level to guarantee success in a specific activity or in several activities. The program should include offerings in team-oriented activities such as basketball, volleyball and soccer; in

individual activities such as tennis, archery and badminton; in body control activities such as tumbling, wrestling, and gymnastics; in rhythm activities such as folk, square and creative dance; and in aquatic activities if facilities are available. From these varied experiences, each student should be able to select one or more to pursue in high school and develop a level of skill that would make it possible for the student to continue participation throughout life.

The daily lesson should have four basic parts. A set pattern should be established so that the students are accustomed to a daily routine of activity. The first part of the lesson should consist of stretching and warm-up activities. The second phase of the daily lesson should consist of skill development. This can be a review and practice of previously-learned skills or the introduction of a new skill pattern. The third part of a lesson is the application of the skills. Students should not learn skills in a vacuum. That is, they should not be subjected to skill drills all period without an opportunity to apply these skills in an activity. The application of skill could be in a cooperative effort such as two players seeing how many times they can bump a volleyball in the air, or it could be in competition between two players or two teams. The final phase of each period should be a cool-down, mild activity to let the cardiovascular and respiratory systems recover slowly. Even when a class is in Tournament Play, this pattern should be followed. A sports team does not walk onto the playing arena and start the game. They practice the skills in a warm-up period before playing. This should also be happening in a physical education class.

The program should be vigorous. Reasons for a daily period of physical education have been discussed. That daily period should be vigorous to ensure proper growth and development of the students.

Exercise physiologists tell us that we need to exercise at or above 70% of our maximum heart rate for at least 20 minutes to benefit the cardiorespiratory system of the body. This intensity should be realized every day within the context of the physical education class. The activities should also be designed to develop muscular strength and endurance as well as joint and body flexibility. A pattern that is typical in some programs consisting of 10 jumping jacks, 10 setups, 10 pushups and 10 seconds of stretching before going into a fairly sedentary skill pratice is not sufficient. If the activity is not a vigorous one, such as archery, the student should have at least a 20-minute period of activity before starting skill practice. In a more vigorous activity like soccer, the students should be stretched thoroughly and then start the instructional phase of the lesson. The cardiovascular workout will come from the vigorous play involved in the game of soccer.

The content should be skill oriented. There should be skill instruction or skill review and practice each lesson. There is a saying that a child cannot run until he can walk. It is also true that a child cannot play basketball until he can shoot properly, or dribble properly or pass properly. We are charged with teaching proper mechanics so students can perform at their optimum level of ability. These motor patterns can only be developed through repetition. Proper mechanics can be ingrained only with many repeated efforts so it is imperative that skills be practiced every day under the supervision of a dedicated physical education teacher. The overall concept should be one of skill mastery. That is apparent in the Individualized and Competency based curriculums and should be in all curriculums. The requirement should be to master a certain level of skill and not just to be a warm body in attendance.

Instruction about the mechanics involved in the physical skills being taught, and about the physiological concepts of fitness should be an integral part of daily instruction. An understanding of the scientific basis of exercises will help the students become better able to become independent learners.

The program content should be progressive. We need to develop this progression in two ways. There needs to be a progression of skill content within each activity being taught. You must remember that these students are at different stages in their growth toward adulthood. There could be a difference of up to one and one/half feet in height and fifty to sixty pounds in weight between individuals in a class. The progression in skills should be structured so that each student will be able to "plug in" at his/her own level of skill. You cannot expect all students at this age to be at the same skill level or meet the same skill standards. It is much more logical and important for each student to have a successful experience at his/her own ability level. This progression can be planned on a continuum through the three grades with records indicating individual progress or the activity requirements can be divided into specific levels, (i.e, level 1 basketball, level 2 basketball).

The second way progression should be developed is through activity scheduling. There is a vast difference between sixth and eighth graders or seventh and ninth graders in physical, emotional, social and mental maturity. Their ability to understand, to perform and to persevere is much stronger at the higher grade levels in the middle school. The length of time activities are scheduled should reflect these differences. Much discussion has taken place in our profession about the optimum length of a unit. Should it be three weeks, four weeks or ten to twelve weeks. The real decision on length

should be based upon the purpose for which the unit is to be used. This purpose should be different for the sixth and seventh grade than it is for the eighth or ninth grade. The majority of the younger students are in some phase of the rapid growth. Their body size and configuration is changing and their body chemistry is changing. Things are happening to them which they do not fully understand. They have this new body with its elongated limbs with which to work and experiment. They need exploratory activities. Units should be of shorter duration because once the experiment is over they are ready and eager for another. They are not ready to concentrate and work on the same skills over a period of weeks or months. The flush of immediate success wanes very quickly at this age. For example - A few years ago I was asked to work with a national bowling group to assist in developing educational materials for middle school age children. The basic reason this organization saw for developing new educational materials was that the children did not stay with their program. The first session would be flooded with eager, active, bright-eyed participants. The second and even the third sessions were well attended but within a period of two to three weeks attendance dropped off dramatically. It was not the fault of the materials being used that attendance declined. These students had satisfied their curiosity about bowling - they had met the challenge and were ready to attempt something new.

Conversely, the eighth or ninth graders have completed or are in the last phase of their rapid growth period. Their bodies are capable of increasing strength and endurance. Their mental discipline is developed to the point that they are capable, and even eager, to work over a long period of time to perfect skills. These students should have the opportunity to develop a high level of skill

in specific activities. Units of ten or twelve weeks would be beneficial for these students. Skills and strategies can be learned to so that the students would have confidence enough to participate in the activity after leaving the middle school.

This tells us that the physical education program should progress from short, exploratory units at the sixth and seventh grade levels to longer units to instill advanced level skills in specific activities at the 8th or 9th grade level.

Summary

The goal of any program is to meet the needs of all of the students in the school. The first step is to require a daily period of physical education for every student. There is no reason to excuse anyone from a physical education program if it contains all of the parts discussed in this presentation. To excuse a special education student would deny that student an opportunity to develop healthy exercise habits. To excuse an athlete is to cheat that athlete out of an opportunity to develop skill in activities that can be participated in for a life time.

The second step of intramural competition along with the third step of club sports provide an opportunity to select activities for participation at a level above the required class expectations. I am aware of an intramural program in a middle school that had a 90% participation rate over a school year. A successful program takes time, effort and enthusiasm of the teacher who is interested in developing the potential of every student in the school.

The final step is an athletic program for the physically gifted.

A school that can boast of having all four of these components functioning effectively is what the physical education teachers and school principals should be striving to develop. Then, and only then, are they truly meeting all of the physical activity needs of their student body.

ABSTRACT

PROGRAMS AND PRACTICES TO MEET THE
NEEDS OF THE MIDDLE SCHOOL CHILD

Students in the middle school are all sizes and shapes physically, at different levels of mental maturity and at different stages of socialization. The diverse needs of these individuals can be satisfied only by providing a comprehensive physical education program containing a required program supplemented with intramurals, club sports and interschool components. The interschool competition could be unnecessary if the other three facets of the program are functioning to their fullest and should have lowest priority for facilities, budget and faculty time. The club sports and intramural programs are barely touched by many schools and have tremendous room for expansion. These programs have declined because of demands on facilities but perhaps administrators should reevaluate their priorities to meet the needs of the majority of the students in their school. Students should have the opportunity to experience a wide variety of activities in a daily program in their transitional years. The lessons should be vigorous, skill development oriented, with instruction on mechanical and physiological concepts incorporated into the teaching. The length of time activities are scheduled should reflect the developmental differences between sixth and eighth graders, with short exploratory activities for sixth graders and longer skill developing units for eighth graders.